COMPREHENSION OF POETRY

ABSTRACT

Topic of Research : COMPREHENSION OF POETRY : A Comparison between the First Language (Marathi) and Second Language (English) comprehension of the undergraduate students.

Subject : Linguistics.

Place of Research : Department of Linguistics, Deccan College, Pune - 411 006.

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Introduction :

The present study aims at testing the comprehension of poetry at the undergraduate level in the colleges in Maharashtra. Comprehension of poetry is selected because it occupies nearly 40% space in the syllabuses. We selected five representative English poems. We have used this opportunity to compare the comprehension of English poems with that of Marathi poems. Marathi is the Mother Tongue of the students and is taught as the First Language in Maharashtra. English is the Second Language and is a compulsory subject like Marathi. Five poems were selected from each language on the basis of their frequency in various anthologies.

In the introduction we present an outline of the topic, its scope and discuss the validity of comparative research in language studies.
In Chapter 1:

We discuss and define the basic concepts involved in language learning. The term comprehension is discussed elaborately taking into consideration the psycho-physiological implications, verbal and non-verbal reception, perception, understanding and comprehension.

In Chapter 2:

We discuss language learning, the nature of language learning processes involved in the first language acquisition, the formal and informal ways of language learning, the established theories of first language acquisition. (Such as the behaviouristic theory, the cognitive and generative theory.). The strategies of language learning, simple and complex learning, the development of language skills and comprehension ability are discussed.

In the second part we discuss second language learning, kinds of learning, conditions of second language learning and psychological approaches to the second language. (Such as behaviouristic approach, functional approach and cognitive approach).

In the third part we discuss bilingualism in the Indian context and specifically in the context of Maharashtra. We also discuss the implications of the psychological theories of bilingualism and consider the cultural values involved in it.
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In Chapter 3:

We discuss the status of Marathi in the educational system of Maharashtra, and the historical perspective of the Marathi language. We discuss the importance and use of English in the Indian society and the educational set up of Maharashtra. English is being studied as a compulsory subject in the schools and colleges at present.

In Chapter 4:

We discuss teaching of poetry as a form of literature. We also consider questions such as what is poetry? Why is it important to teach it? and How is it taught at different levels? What is its place in the language syllabuses? Also we state how English and Marathi poetry should be taught and at what stage.

In Chapter 5:

We discuss comprehension of poetry. We distinguish between linguistic comprehension and poetic comprehension. By linguistic comprehension we mean the understanding of linguistic codes. By poetic comprehension we mean understanding of the content of the poem and the use of literary devices.

Then we discuss testing the comprehension of poetry to find out the achievement of the undergraduate students in the first and second languages.

In Chapter 6:

We give the procedure for selecting five Marathi and
five English poems. Then we present the questionnaires based on three types of questions—multiple choice questions, descriptive type questions and questions asking students to write their impressions. We then give the location of the colleges where the tests were held and the background of the students and the procedure used for data presentation.

In Chapter 7:

We present the analysis of the collected data in the tables and graphs. We have given the percentages of correct answers, incorrect answers, near to correct answers and of the students who did not answer the questions at all. The statistical result in brief is:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Marathi</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>i&gt; Multiple choice qu/reception/</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ii&gt; Descriptive type qu/understanding.</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iii&gt; Impression writing/comprehension.</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We then present the interpretation of these tables and graphs.
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In Chapter 8:

We discuss our findings on the basis of the conclusions drawn by I. A. Richards. That is we try to interpret the failure in comprehension by identifying the reasons discussed by I. A. Richards.

In Chapter 9:

In order to confirm the identified difficulties we gave one additional verification test based on I. A. Richards's analysis. We selected a group of twenty new undergraduate students in the urban area of Nasik and a group of twenty students in the rural area of Shripure Dist. Dhuie. We selected one simple poem from Marathi and one from English. Then we devised questions that would point out the ten difficulties mentioned by Richards. This experiment confirms the results of the earlier test. We find that there is not much difference in comprehension in English and that in Marathi. We observed that on an average 40% of the learners do not answer the questions. Out of the remaining 46% of the students have difficulties in poetic comprehension. That is, only 14% of the students do not have much difficulty in poetic comprehension.

In Chapter 10:

We take a survey of what we have done so far. Then we draw conclusions regarding the experiment.

1. The ability to use language whether Marathi or English is more or less the same.
2. There is not much difference in the quality of comprehension of poetry in Marathi and that in English.
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3. Urban-Rural distinction has not affected comprehension.

4. Special efforts are required in the teaching of poetry to develop poetic sensibility.

5. Teaching of Marathi and English has got to be improved and teaching of literature should include interpretative procedures.

6. We find that the comprehension of poetry of undergraduate students is quite unsatisfactory. Language development and language achievement in both the languages is stagnant.